

Note on East German Developments - 17 June 1953

The explosion of a permitted workers' demonstration in East Berlin on 16 June into a virtual revolt against the East German Government on 17 June has confronted the Soviets with a critical choice of policies.

- The de-communication policy in full effect since 9 June appears to have been undertaken at least in part to further the cause of German unity by reducing the differences between East and West Germany
- This has led to greater freedom of discussion and action for East Germans which finally erupted in today's riots
- The Soviets now can (a) continue decommunization and other tactical retreats in pursuit of unification, or (b) suppress with severity the outbreaks in East Berlin and resume the satellization of East Germany.
- Alternative (a) would be tantamount to forgiving the riots - which would tend to encourage more, both in East Germany and later in Poland and Czechoslovakia and might seriously undermine internal security throughout Eastern Europe
- Alternative (b) would intensify the difference between East and West Germany and would constitute a repudiation not only of all recent conciliatory moves in East Germany but of much of the recent international "peace offensive" as well.

The Soviet choice of policy in regard to these riots should, taken in this framework, provide clear indication of the intensity, or lack of it, in their desire for German unity.

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Notes on the 17 June Revolt

Demonstrations began in afternoon of 16 June for reduction in work norms (quotas) which had been raised 10% on 28 May: these apparently had police approval and involved almost 5000 persons.

Demonstrations continued to 0030 17 June - with some mob damage - police cars overturned, windows of HO stores broken. One large factory was stopped by failure of midnight shift to show up. Agitators harangued at street corners most of the night calling for a general strike at 7 AM. Principal agitators seen to have come from the Stalin Allee construction workers.

- From 0430, 17 June, Soviet tanks began moving into center of East Berlin.

By 0830, thousands of marchers converging on Strausberger Platz which was heavily cordoned by East German police.

By 1100, S-Bahn and some V-Bahn traffic halted by railroad workers strike; West Berlin traffic halted by power cut-off. Over 40,000 demonstrators gathering in Potsdamer Platz beginning to get off of hand tearing down flags, overturning kiosks, etc. No Soviet intervention; East German police responsible, although many defecting.

About this time Nuschke "defected" to W Berlin police at Tempelhoof, is now in the hands of the CIC, ^{claims} to have been kidnapped and wants to return to East sector.

By 1300 violence was out of control of East German Police, many of whom were badly roughed up. Buildings set afire, some looting.

At 1345 martial law was imposed and Soviet troops took over - about 3000 in the city with 40 tanks. East German police and Soviet troops begin firing into crowds. Soviet troop reinforcements, estimated at one mechanized division, began moving into East Berlin from the South. West Berlin police placed in alert.

Riots reported in Magdeburg, Brandenburg, Ludwigsfelde, Halle, Warnemünde and a few other points.

At 1800 official SED proclamation assured crowds of speedy fulfillment of just demands and urging not to be exploited by "Fascist agents"

As of 1800 heavy crowds still on the street, two large fires burning Soviet reinforcements concentrating in Stalin Allee.

By 2000, order largely restored, with only sporadic shooting.

By 2100 - curfew hour - crowds pretty much dispersed.

Notes on the 17 June Revolt

Demonstrations on 16 June for reduction in work norms raised 10% on 28 May took place with apparent police approval.

Late in the demonstration, agitation began for free elections, repudiation of the Volksherm and East German Government, and unity now.

Demonstrators spread through East Berlin after the march and harangued on street corners most of the night, inciting a general strike at 7 AM. Principal agitators were from among the Stalin Atlee construction gangs.

The strike took place as scheduled and paralyzed train transport throughout East Germany and subways and elevators in East Berlin. The revolt spread, according to Reuters, to Erfurt and Magdeburg, large rail centers near the zonal boundary.

Fifty thousand workers, meanwhile, marched on government Headquarters in Potsdamer Platz and Leipzigerstrasse. This was broken up by Soviet T-34 tanks and armored cars and machine guns and small arms fire, after about four hours of resting. At least two were killed, one under a Soviet tank tread and more than 100 wounded.

Martial law was declared - forbidding assemblies of more than 3 persons at a time and imposing a curfew on vehicles from 9 PM to 5 AM. A Soviet armored division has been ordered into the city with 10,000 troops and 200 tanks.

At the height of the demonstration, East German Deputy Premier Otto Nuschke, of the DCU, fled to police at Tempelhof and sought asylum. He later claimed he had been pushed across the zonal border and wished to be returned to the Soviet sector.

Late reports state minor clashes are still occurring and strikes are spreading to other industries. A Communist store and a restaurant have been set afire at Potsdamer Platz.